Vietnam War Oral History Project

Interview with Lt. Col William Logan, Retired Airforce

May 15, 2012

Lt. Col. Bill Logan joined the military in 1963 and served until he retired in 1988. He served one tour of duty in South East Asia from December, 1969 to April, 1970.

Paul: Today's date is May 15th, 2012. My name is Paul Robards, Library Director of Roberts Memorial Library at Middle Georgia College. I will be speaking today with Lt. Colonel William Logan from Warner Robins, GA about his experiences in the Vietnam War.

Robards: In what branch of the military did you serve?

Logan: Air Force

Robards: Why did you join the military?

Logan: To learn a trade. I was in college; I was 21 years old. I was an English major. We had a [military] draft. The only way you could avoid it, well first of all you had to get your military requirement out of the way. So, you could let them draft you and you could go in the Army for two years, and you knew where you were going, or you could enlist, or sign up, or volunteer and at least control your destiny somewhat. As a liberal arts graduate, in 1963, my future was selling Lady Kenmores or something like that, and I didn't look at that as a very promising start, so I said, "Maybe they'll teach me something." So, I signed up for the Air Force to see what would happen. And of course, they did; they taught me to be an air traffic controller, or [rather] a weapons controller; we brought airplanes together instead of keeping them apart and took our fighters and aimed them at the bad guys. Then later on, I learned to fly. So they taught me a lot.

Robards: How old were you when you joined the military?

Logan: 22

Robards: What was your hometown when you joined?

Logan: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Robards: Where did you go for basic training?

Logan: Lackland [AFB], San Antonio, Texas. Everybody went there back then. We had twelve squadrons in officer's training school. It was just jammed. It was terrific!

Robards: Where did you attend Advanced Training, and how long did it last?

Logan: It was really technical training. Panama City, [FL] was the first school that I went to in January '64. They taught me weapons controlling—the things we had to do to achieve the air defense mission. It was an awakening for a kid who had studied English in college. I got my eyes opened.

Robards: What aspects of your training did you use during the war?

Logan: Well, after that [training], I went to pilot training in my third year in the service. I didn't go to [Vietnam] right away, obviously. I went in '66 and graduated in '67, and I was a B-52 crew member. I was 25 years old; a brand new First Lieutenant.

Robards: Do you think that military training changed you in any way?

Logan: Yes. I can't begin to tell you how, but it was when I began to grow up. I graduated probably third from the bottom of my college class. I was terrible; I was a train wreck when I was 22 years old, but by the time I was 25 I was a whole different person.

Robards: What was your job description or occupation code?

Logan: I started out as a 1741[air weapons controller], and then the pilot code was, I think, 1135. I was a bomber pilot; I flew B-52s out of Warner Robins, Georgia in 1967 and then on for a couple of years after that.

Robards: Did you volunteer to serve in the Vietnam War?

Logan: [I] waited my turn. That is how we did it. Everybody lined up, and you went when they called you. It wasn't a question of volunteering; you were going. But we didn't go for a year like everybody else did. The rules said they could send you someplace for 179 days. If they sent you for 180, that was a tour, and you were an Air Force resource when you came out. SAC (Strategic Air Command) said, "We're not going to lose all our people that way;" so we went for 179 days or less in each deployment. So you might go for 4 months, or 5 months or six months, but one day shy

[of 180 days]; you were back home for 179 days or thereabouts when you would go back again for another 179 days, and then you'd come back home, and you might go again. I know guys that went 3 or 4 times. None of it counted, because when you got back home, you could get orders sending you to Vietnam for a year. And it happened! And it happened. And it destroyed families! It was terrible on families; guys were going crazy. But that is how we went; we didn't go as an assignment, we went on Temporary Duty, [be]cause they didn't want to lose control of us.

Robards: How did you feel when you learned you were going to South East Asia?

Logan: It was my turn…..it was [just] my turn.

Robards: In what regions, towns or villages did you serve in South East Asia?

Logan: Guam, Okinawa, Thailand; I also served in Korea for a full year.

Robards: What was your home base in South East Asia?

Logan: Guam is where the headquarters really were, but we had big units at both Okinawa and Thailand. So when you were there, it was just like going from one command to another—it was just the same.

Robards: What are the names of the units to which you were assigned?

Logan: I can't remember. The only one I really remember was here; the 19th Bomb Wing, 28th Bomb Squadron. In Vietnam, I don't know what they called us. We were people there to fly the airplanes. The guys in the cadre were from McDill [Air Force Base, FL]. We really weren't assigned to squadrons or anything like that.

Robards: What were your dates of service in Southeast Asia?

Logan: Overall service was from 20 September, 1963 through 31 May, 1988. [I was] commissioned December 20, 1963, and retired as a Lieutenant Colonel 24 years and 9 months later.

Robards: Describe your living conditions, housing and food during this tour of duty.

Logan: When we were in Guam, we lived in stone or masonry buildings—very comfortable. In Okinawa, it was very much the same. It was like a bachelor officer's quarters—also very comfortable. When we went to U-Tapao, Thailand, that was a

different story. They were trailers that had been hooked together; so your crew had four of these things. Three of the areas were sleeping areas and one was kind of like a family room, and it was air-conditioned, but it didn't work very well. It was rudimentary compared to what we were normally used to.

Robards: What did you do for entertainment?

Logan: Drank. A lot. The Officer's Club was open all the time. They had stage shows that they brought in; nothing of any salaciousness or anything like that. It was always kind of cool, really. They had some good comedians. But mostly we drank, [be]cause we were on a pretty tight schedule. I think it was about 150 day rotation. In 150 days, you would have gone through all three stages and then started over. You started out in Guam with the 12 hour missions, and then you went to Okinawa with the 8 hour missions, and then you went to U-Tapao, Thailand with the 5 hour missions. As the missions got shorter, the number of days you stayed there got longer. And then you started all over again until your time came to go home.

Robards: Could you please describe your first encounter with the enemy and how you reacted to it?

Logan: I didn't encounter the enemy; I dropped bombs on him. We were essentially unopposed; so can you call that fighting? We contributed to the war effort. We didn't get attacked by enemy fighters. There was no flak or anything like that. We were up too high. You couldn't see us; you couldn't hear us. So, my first mission was a 12 hour run out of Guam. Take off, go to the entry point, go to the IT, do the bomb run, come home. We came home at 43,000 feet, straight into the sun.

Robards: What engagements and or campaigns did you serve in?

Logan: It was called Arc Light, which was part of an overall project called Rolling Thunder.

Robards: What kind of weapons did your unit employ?

Logan: B-52 bombers. We carried varying bomb loads depending on what kind of bombs we carried. Forgive me if these numbers are not exactly correct, but we could carry something like 56,000 pounders. We could carry 72 or 73 mixed bag of 750s, or 108 500-pounders. We almost always had a mixed load; made a lot of noise, tore down a lot of trees, and killed a lot of monkeys, I suppose. We were [personally] armed with .38 caliber pistols.

Robards: As a B-52 aircrew member, how many combat missions did you fly?

Logan: 50.

Robards: Describe the most memorable event that happened when you were in Vietnam.

Logan: The most memorable thing that occurred to me in Vietnam I'm not sure had anything to do with the war, but it had to do with flight experiences. [It was] a couple of [times] taking off into thunder storms and experiencing real spatial disorientation. I was a co-pilot at the time, and I had to take control of the aircraft, because the pilot couldn't see where we were going on the runway. That is how hard it was raining. I could see the yellow line, [be]cause I had a slightly different angle, and I could find where the yellow line was. Normally we wouldn't go, that's how hard it was [raining], but war is hell, so we pitched off into it, and the first thing you did was make a left hand turn and of course, as soon as I started to do that, I just kept on going in my ears [sensory perception is derived from semi-circular canals in ears]. I was upside down for twenty minutes before we got out of that one. That was kind of interesting.

Another time we lost two generators right after take-off. We lost electrical power. For us, it meant an abort. That meant we were going to stay around the area and go home. Some airplanes, you can dump all the gas out; a B-52 you can't. So the only thing we could do was fly around [and] burn it off until we got light enough that we [could] land with all the bombs. We were going to jettison them, but, well it was a long story. We ended up having to put the gear down; we had to put the flaps down; we had to burn off and then put them [flaps] up so that the fuel pumps could catch up. Then we had to drop them down and burn off some more and bring them up again. I spent four hours trying to refigure the weight and balance of the airplane so that we wouldn't go nose down and tail up when we hit.

These were the kinds of things that were exciting at that end of the war. We never saw an enemy fighter, until the very end. We never got shot at much that you could tell until the very end, and I wasn't there at that time. But it was an experience that I won't forget for a long time, either.

Robards: What is your evaluation of American military leadership during the Vietnam War, and of your immediate commanders in the field?

Logan: They were terrific. They were smart; they were reasonable. You could argue your point; they'd listen to you and you knew they took what you said into account. It was the guys higher up that were the problem. The stories have never come out about what they did or failed to do, or why they did what they did. I remember one night in U-Tapao, sitting at the end of the runway for almost an hour, engines running, [while] waiting for the President of the United States to decide what target we were going to bomb that night. You can't run a war that way.

Robards: What medals or awards did you receive for serving in Vietnam?

Logan: Two Air Medals, Vietnam Service Medal. I was a good boy, and I went home.

Robards: Briefly explain why you think the U.S. was involved in the war in Vietnam?

Logan: I think it was essentially politics. Kennedy inherited that from Eisenhower. It had already begun when he became president. I remember in '64, when I was a Lieutenant stationed in Ohio, before I went overseas the first time, we had a radio show that we did for the local radio station. We'd bring our guys on, and we'd talk about stuff. One of the things we talked about was guys who had just come back from Vietnam. This was in 1964. We weren't even sure that they were shooting at us then; well, they [the returning men] confirmed that indeed they [Vietnamese] were. There was a hot war going on over there, and we'd best be ready for it. So, there was a lot of that…there were hints. How much was real and how much politics? I tend to think it was political.

Robards: How did you feel about your military service in Vietnam when you left the country?

Logan: It was over. It had been a valuable experience [for me]. I did not have post traumatic stress disorder, but I'm glad I didn't have to go back, or at least I wasn't going to go back for a while, anyway.

Robards: How did you feel once you arrived back in the United States?

Logan: I was okay. Warner Robins was a military town, and they [understood]. I experienced some of it later in my military career. In 1974, I got stationed in New Haven, CT, and I was told by a senior officer, "Don't wear your uniform; when you are in the civilian community. Don't wear your uniform any more than you have to. Take it with you when you go someplace, then take it off before you leave." I said, "Why do you do that?" [The senior officer whispered] "They don't like you." I never experienced anything overtly, but I thought it strange that someone would tell me to do that. I didn't do it, anyway. I wore my uniform everyplace I went. Nobody said anything.

Robards: How did this war experience most affect your life?

Logan: It taught me…it is really kind of hard to say. That is what we did, (what we do) even before Vietnam, when I first got in it [military]. Nuclear weapons…that is what we did; we were trained to drop those things, and we were prepared to do that. When we got to Vietnam, it was the same thing; they were just iron bombs, that's all. I never had any emotional or moral problems with that. Maybe I saw too many war movies…I don't know. It also seemed so sterile. You couldn't see anything. You couldn't see what you hit. You couldn't tell if you did any damage. [When] you were over the target, you could feel the bombs drop; you could feel the plane shake a little bit, otherwise you wouldn't even know they were going. You made this big turn, and the first thing you had to do was send back this report; so you didn't even get to look out the window to see if you could see the smoke and flames or whatever you hit. You had to get this report [sent] off; so I had my head turned back in the cockpit that minute or so that we were trying to get out of there, because that thing had to be sent out immediately. So you didn't even get to see the effects of what you did. It was not like the guys and fighters that were doing the low-level stuff. We were up 5 to 7 miles above it. In a sense, it was just a kind of bizarre experience. It was surreal; sometimes you'd be going along on this beautiful sunshiny day, and you'd talk to this guy on the radio, and he'd tell you where to go and then he'd say, "5, 4, 3, 2, 1 drop," and you'd do that [drop the bomb], and then start a turn. He'd say, "Thank you very much. See you tomorrow or the next day." Strange.

Robards: If you could go back to December, 1969, would you repeat this experience, or would you change anything about it?

Logan: I wouldn't go if I didn't have to…..you just don't want to go kill people. I mean, it is just not in your nature, but these are the circumstances, so you have to do it. I'd prefer not to do it again, but if it were necessary, I think I would. I was over in the Middle East the night the Egyptians came across the canal, in 1973, and I got to see some of the mobilization and that sort of stuff from a somewhat different perspective. So, I'd prefer not to go again, at my age now, especially. I'd prefer not to go again if I didn't have to.

Robards: Is there anything we haven't brought up that you would like to share about your Vietnam War experience?

Logan: The biggest thing about my experience is the disillusionment that came out of it. Our newspapers and our television people who presented the war to us…they got it

wrong, and nobody had the guts to stand up and tell them. They were lying, or at a minimum, they just didn't have their facts straight. Military people are kind of indoctrinated that you don't stand up to the press publicly. So, you never could tell your real story. But from the very beginning, they were getting it wrong. They never did…never did get caught up. I'm not sure that even today that most people know that we were not getting beaten as badly as everybody said, in fact we were doing quite well. That's the part where I lost my innocence as far as the political system and the system for disseminating information. It just didn't seem right…didn't seem right.

Robards: Thank you, Lt. Col. Logan, for your service and dedication to our country and for participating in this oral history project.

Logan: Thank you so much for asking me. I appreciate it.